

Weekly National Intelligencer.

By GALE & SEATON.
JAMES C. WELLES, ASSOCIATE EDITOR.
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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1863.

THE ENROLLMENT LAW.

In referring some days ago to the different suggestions that have been made in regard to the expediency of amending the enrollment act passed by the last Congress, and especially of repealing the "three hundred dollar commutation clause," we intimated that the Report of the Secretary of War might, by its recommendation or its statistical data, shed some light on the questions raised under this head. In that report the Secretary refers to the subject in the following terms:

"The operation of the act of Congress for enrolling and calling out the national forces is exhibited in the accompanying report of the Provost Marshal General. At the time that law was enacted it was known to be very imperfect, many intelligent persons considering its execution wholly impracticable, while few dared to hope for any important benefit. The law has been enforced in twelve States. It has brought to these States fifty thousand soldiers, and has raised a fund of over ten millions for procuring substitutes. With all its imperfections it is demonstrated that the act can be made an efficient means for recruiting our armies and calling out the national forces. The principal imperfections and the required amendments will be submitted to Congress through the appropriate committees. The most important to be considered is what is called the three hundred dollar commutation. This feature of the act has been much discussed, and opposing opinions are nearly balanced as to the operation and effect of this provision. While some claim that it is oppressive upon poor men and favors the rich, others contend that it places rich and poor on an equal footing, and enables the poor man to obtain exemption from military duty for a sum within the reach of every one. Without undertaking to reconcile or decide between these conflicting opinions, it is certain that this clause of exemption, as it stands, occasions delay in calling out the military force. The drafted man is exempted, at the end of a long proceeding, by the payment of a sum of money. Supporting that sum to be adequate for procuring a substitute, considerable time unavoidably elapses before a competent substitute can be procured. The question whether this clause shall remain or be stricken out requires the early attention of Congress. The fund of ten millions raised by the act as commutation money is deposited with the United States Assistant Treasurers, and is being applied to procuring substitutes by the payment of bounties and premiums."

The number of soldiers obtained by the draft already had under the act amounts to "about 50,000 men." The exact sum paid under the "commutation clause" was \$10,518,000, representing 35,060 soldiers. Thus it appears that out of a draft calling for 300,000 men, only 85,060 recruits were obtained in men, and in money representing men to be procured by the Government. It follows, therefore, on the supposition that the draft had been exhaustively applied, that 364,940 men escaped its operations under other provisions of the act than that above indicated. For, if fifty per cent in addition to the number of men demanded had been every where drawn, the whole number of names actually drawn would have numbered 450,000. And, by subtracting from this sum the number of recruits obtained and the number who paid their commutation fee, we have a remainder of 364,940, representing the persons who were exempted under various clauses of the enrollment act. And while it is known that in point of fact the draft was not "exhaustively applied," having been enforced in only twelve States, it is none the less easy to discern, in the light of the facts revealed by these proximate statistics, that the great "leak" in this law do not reside in the quarter which is commonly indicated.

Among the causes of exemption allowed by the act as it now stands are, almsgiving, unsuitableness of age, maintenance of dependent parents, non-residence, physical and mental disability, and others. It is under these heads, coupled with the evasion of many who have shirked their obligation after being drafted, that we must look for the source of the large deficit in the results of the last draft. And we have every reason to believe that some of these "leaks" in the law have been in a very considerable degree stopped by the late regulations of the Provost Marshal General, allowing persons to appear before an appropriate board in advance of the draft, and have their names stricken from the enrollment list for good and sufficient cause shown. In this way the lists are pruned of the redundancies which have heretofore impaired the efficiency of the law; and we have every reason to expect that the next draft, even without any change being made in the law as it now stands, will yield a much larger return than the last in both men and money. The Provost Marshal General states this fact in the following extract from his recent report to the Secretary of War. He says:

"The enrollment of the forces of the United States necessarily included slaves and persons disqualified, for various reasons, for military duty, because the enrolling officer was not authorized to omit any one between the ages of twenty and forty-five. The draft was made from the lists thus composed; the enrollment was drafted were excluded, thus reducing the proportion of those who were held as compared with those exempted. This result would have been avoided, and a larger proportion of troops would have been secured, if the law had required the enrolling officer to examine previous to the draft, but this would have delayed the draft."

The whole subject is fraught with many embarrassments, but we must not forget that while men are deliberating on the subject in Washington the negroes are dying by hundreds in Mississippi. All agree that something must be done for their relief. It is not a question of party, but of humanity. It is idle to say that the negroes should not have been reduced to this forlorn condition. The past cannot be recalled, and the present hour has its duties and responsibilities which all humane men are bound to meet, without distinction of party. Especially is it the Government called to devise ways and means for coping with exigencies which it has created by its military policy.

We are enabled to state, on reliable authority, that a letter published in the New York Tribune a day or two ago, purporting to be a letter from President LINCOLN to our Minister in England, Mr. ADAMS, was not written by the President. The letter being a fabrication, the alleged conversation of Mr. Adams with Earl Russell is, of course, also a fabrication.

The customary annual visit of the Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States was postponed on the 7th instant on account of the illness of the President, but, upon a formal notice that he would be happy to see them on Thursday, the Justices of the Court on that day paid their respects to him, having for that purpose proceeded in a body to the Executive Mansion.

PROVISION FOR FREEDMEN.

The attention of our readers, in common with that of all humane persons in the United States, has been repeatedly called to the destitute and suffering condition of the freedmen within our military lines in the South and Southwest. It is well known to all that just so far as our armies advance and occupy the land, the relation of master and slave practically ceases to exist. The masters retreat to the South with a portion of their slaves, and the rest flee to our lines for shelter and protection. The plantations cease to be cultivated, and, as has been well said, "all the machinery of life is thrown out of gear, if indeed civil society is not in a great measure broken up." Of the slaves who come to us, we take the able-bodied and convert them into soldiers and laborers, and then there remain the women and children. These are slaves who, as a necessary result of our military policy in regard to the blacks, have been deprived of their masters, and among these unfortunates are wives and children whom we have deprived of their husbands and fathers.

In view of this military conscription of the able-bodied blacks at the South, the New York Times justly argues a national responsibility for the safe-keeping and sustenance of the black families thus left without their natural guardians and supporters. To this effect our contemporary says:

"It must be remembered that for the peculiar misfortunes of these wretched families the nation is not only responsible but proximately responsible. In the little companies of refugees which continually entered our lines, there were a sufficient number of able-bodied men to have supported both the infirm and the children. But the military exigencies required the services of the men, and they were forced or received into the army. As a natural consequence, their families were left dependent on public support. Still, even with this unfortunate result of our invasion, there need have been no absolute pauperism or suffering had there been any proper organization for the care and management of these poor people. They were left, however, to the chance mercies of the officers and men of the army, and the only directors placed over them, we believe, were certain chaplains, who, whatever their disposition, had, of course, no police or sanitary powers and no authority to organize labor. Gen. Grant, like a true soldier, has always shown himself most humane and considerate toward these unfortunate refugees; but what can a General, at the head of a hundred thousand men, in face of the enemy, do in the management and settlement of some of the most intricate social questions—that is, the proper treatment of poverty and the care of the myriads of these black castaways?"

The accounts given by army chaplains and others with regard to the sufferings of this dependent class are of the most harrowing description. They represent that thousands upon thousands of slave women and children, together with infirm old men, are scattered about on the banks of the Mississippi, in rough camps, under no supervision, suffering from sickness, exposure, and often hunger, and dying in startling numbers. Their camps or settlements have no sanitary police; they are unprotected with proper clothing or medical attendance; they depend for food on the charity of the army officers, and no machinery for providing them with regular work has been contrived. Among all the dreadful scenes which have accompanied this war, probably none have exceeded in pathos and suffering some of those displayed in the "freedmen's camps" on the banks of the Mississippi. The reader will find a moving appeal under this head in another part of to-day's paper, from the pen of the Rev. Mr. Fiske, who speaks from personal knowledge of the destitution and misery he seeks to relieve.

Various plans have been suggested for the proper organization of labor among the freed slaves as a means of making them self-sustaining. The Emancipation Commission have proposed a system of local superintendents under a national superintendent, who shall have charge of the sanitary condition, moral welfare, and industry of all the freedmen of the country—the whole, we suppose, to be responsible directly to the Secretary of War. The details of this complicated plan were spread before our readers some months ago. Meanwhile the Secretary of War, in his recent Report, benevolently recommends that they should be maintained as wards and pensioners of the Government.

To this effect he says:

"The fortunes of war have brought within our lines a large number of colored women, children, and some aged and infirm persons. Their care, support, and protection rest a solemn trust upon the Government. Their necessities have to some extent been supplied by the order of the Department, but a general and permanent system for their protection and support should be speedily adopted by Congress. Even if they are to be regarded as in some degree a burden upon the Government, they are a greater loss to the enemy. Every woman and child, from nine years old to sixty, has to the rebel planter a high market value. The labor in the cotton field is a source of profit to him; it is not better that we should feed them than that they should support the rebel master who is in arms against us?"

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CIRCUMSTANCES ALTER CASES.

We published a few days ago an extract purporting to be taken from a recent private letter addressed by Gen. Meade "to a friend in New Jersey." In this extract Gen. Meade wrote like a true soldier, Christian, and patriot. But, as he clearly indicated a purpose to waste no blood in fruitless enterprises merely to propitiate the favor of the surviving members of the "on-to-Richmond" party, it was natural that his views, as thus expressed, should stir the bile of the New York Tribune, which supported itself to discern in the wise military principles avowed by Gen. Meade a reflection of "the procrustean policy and inconsequential tactics" ascribed by it to Gen. McClellan. And, in order to clinch this presumption in the minds of its readers, the Tribune ventured to suggest that the "friend in New Jersey" who had received the private letter in question was none other than Gen. McClellan himself. Ergo, the letter was a very bad letter, and Gen. Meade a very poor sort of General—as some people count good Generals, that is Generals who make large butchers' bills.

It came to pass, however, that our discreet contemporary soon discovered that the said letter was not addressed to Gen. McClellan, but to a "leading Republican" in New Jersey, when, presto, the play changes, and we read the following *amendable* conclusion. We quote from yesterday's Tribune:

"We do injustice yesterday to Gen. Meade in presuming a letter of his, quoted by *The World*, was written to Gen. McClellan. The original letter—which was to a near relative in New Jersey, a gentleman well known as a leading Republican of the State and a very determined supporter of the war—has been shown to us. The passage in question, when torn from its context, may be construed as in accordance with the procrustean policy and inconsequential tactics of Gen. McClellan, and such undoubtedly was the malicious intent of *The World*. But when read as a part of the familiar letter to which it belongs, no such construction can be put upon it."

RECAPTURE OF THE CHESAPEAKE.

The steamer Chesapeake, whose capture was announced yesterday, was taken on Thursday morning in Sanborn Harbor, about twenty miles from Halifax, (N.S.) by the Ella and Annie, Lieutenant commanding J. F. Nickels. It seems that her movements have been for some time known to the inhabitants and authorities in Nova Scotia, who, however, had no means of communicating with the gunboats till the Ella and Annie came in for coal. She was informed of the whereabouts of the Chesapeake, followed her from one hiding place to another, and finally captured her. Only three of the piratical crew were taken, the remainder having fled to the woods at the sight of their pursuers.

Lieut. Nickels, after the capture, took his prize in tow and started for an American port, but the United States steamer Acadia soon came up and ordered Lieut. Nickels and his prize into Halifax, to wait the sanction of the act by the Government. The three vessels arrived there late in the evening of Thursday.

It is reported that the authorities of Nova Scotia have issued orders for the arrest of the pirates, and that the officers entrusted with that duty had been resisted.

CAVALRY.

General Halleck's statement of the number of cavalry horses destroyed by our army will strike every body with astonishment. A remount for the whole service once in two months is the rate at which our horses are used up, by want of skill and often culpable neglect of the animals. Four hundred and thirty-five thousand horses will be needed for the coming year if the evil remains unchecked. The enormous waste of horses was one of the points which was urged quite early, we believe, by those who wished to see the volunteer cavalry force kept within narrow limits. The admirable service done by this force will outweigh its immense and needless expense in the opinion of the country. The immense consumption of horses, however, is an evil which is felt outside the army or the Treasury. The stock-breeders declare that if it goes on it will permanently injure the breed of horses in the country. The horses of mature age are being taken up by the Government so fast that young horses are put to work too early, the result of which will be ultimately seen in the diminution of the average size.—Boston Advertiser.

VIRGINIA (LOYAL) LEGISLATURE.

The Senate of Virginia, in session at Alexandria, passed on Friday a bill to provide for the election of delegates to the people to a Convention to assemble in that city on the 25th of January, to alter and amend the State Constitution, and to abolish slavery in the counties of Accomack, Northampton, Princess Anne, Elizabeth City, and York, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth. The President's proclamation of January last proclaims all the slaves in the remainder of the State to be free. The act sets forth as a reason for the change that without it the executive and judicial branches of the State, in executing the laws between master and slave, will be brought into conflict with the military authority of the United States. A bill for a similar purpose is pending in the House of Delegates. From these two bills there is expected to be immediately passed by both Houses.

EXTRAORDINARY SCENE IN CHURCH.

An extraordinary scene occurred at the Park street Methodist church in Cincinnati on Sunday last. While the Pastor was opening the services with prayer the congregation were startled by a series of vociferous and most unseemly outbursts, which, coming from a female, accompanied by the sounds of blows and a railing, raised to their feet the congregation discovered that a "personal difficulty" of the most unusual character was in progress right among them. The Commercial thus reports the scene:

It seems that for some time there have been active hostilities in the church between Mack R. Barnitz, a book-publisher on Fourth street, and Mrs. Nellie Jacobs, both members of the church. Some months ago Mr. Barnitz preferred serious charges against Mrs. Jacobs, and there was a good deal of trouble in the church about it. Mrs. Jacobs was superintendent of the Sabbath school, and used his influence to have Mrs. Jacobs driven from her position as a teacher of one of the classes. It is said that Barnitz used the issue that she was not expelled from the school he would resign the superintendency, and she was, therefore, voted out. She preferred charges against Mr. Barnitz of conduct unbecoming a Christian gentleman, and was unable to press them to a trial. The difficulty between the two was a source of annoyance to the church members generally, and they did not want any thing more to say or do about it. But there is no calculating the strategy of an infuriated woman; and so no one dreamed of the possibility of such a scene as came to pass yesterday.

During the first prayer Mr. Barnitz, who leads the singing in the church, and has a prominent pew, which he occupies with his family, was kneeling and bowed in devotion. Mrs. Jacobs glided along the aisle, and, drawing a casket which she had concealed in her skirts, gave him a violent shake, and then, standing up, and followed by a hot and heavy, giving him a really tremendous lashing about the ears, before those in the vicinity could collect their scattered senses enough to interfere. She accompanied the blows with hysterical cries of "Oh, you villain, 'There, you traitor!'" "Slender a woman, will you, &c." Mr. Hitchcock paused in the prayer, overwhelmed with amazement. 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